

Raising the Flag

By Lt. Col. Jack Roosa
8th Fighter Wing Inspector General

Thirty years ago, in the shadow of the Fra Mauro Highlands, American astronauts diligently prepared to depart the lunar surface of the moon for their voyage back to Earth. Before climbing up the ladder of the lunar module, one of the astronauts turned, paused momentarily and snapped a salute to the U.S. flag planted a few yards away from the spacecraft. Saluting the flag was a simple military gesture of recognition that reflected his pride and respect for our great nation. A few hours later, the Apollo 14 astronauts fired the main engine of the command module and initiated their rendezvous with Earth.

Several weeks after the return of the Apollo 14 mission, I sat in the gallery of the House of Representatives in the U.S. Capitol and watched one of the mission’s astronauts deliver a speech to a joint session of Congress. Standing on the floor of the House, the astronaut began his speech by talking about the courage of a soldier who carried the U.S. flag into battle during the Revolutionary War. He described the motivation of the soldier — fighting for a concept of liberty and self-determination; risking his farm, family and his life for the prospect of a new nation

independent of tyranny and repression. His speech then moved through several periods of American history — associating our flag with the unmitigated courage and heroics of those who had sacrificed all in order that we may keep a union preserved. He talked of countrymen withstanding the ambitions of forces who would test the resolve of our nation, proudly carrying our nation’s colors to battlefields across the world. As he concluded his delivery, he asked the crowd of elected officials to walk outside that night and peer up at the moon. And when they looked at the moon, he encouraged them to remember that there are U.S. flags lodged securely and standing silently on the lunar surface. The astronaut said these flags represented the infinite sacrifices of brave American men and women — sacrifices that embodied the notion that freedom and liberty are dearer than life itself. He concluded by reminding them that only citizens of the United States, and no other nation, could look at the moon and know that their nation’s flag stood firmly upon the lunar surface. I was proud of that man giving the speech — that man was my father.

Since that speech, I’ve tried to expand my understanding of the scope and depth of the sacrifices that are associated with our nation’s flag. In that aspect, I’ve decided to try to find the

“story behind the story” of some of the most memorable military events in which our flag was involved. Undoubtedly, one of the most recognizable events is the raising of the flag on Mount Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II. I’m sure you have seen the historic picture of five Marines and one Navy corpsman straining to hoist a U.S. flag strapped to a makeshift flagpole. What many don’t know is the ferocity of the battle of Iwo Jima. One hundred thousand men battled one another on this small volcanic island for over a month.

The Japanese were well prepared for the attack. They had carved out more than 16 miles of tunnels throughout the island, connecting firing positions in a sophisticated layout, which allowed the Japanese to attack quickly and then retreat into the safety of earthen-covered sanctuaries. The Japanese mortar tubes were ranged-in perfectly for the sloping beaches — dooming the Marines to a costly invasion. As added protection, the Japanese constructed 750 concrete pillboxes, designed to make their forces virtually impervious to naval gunfire and artillery strikes.

For 36 days, U.S. Marines fought tenaciously for every inch of island soil. The fierce battle rolled up 25,851 American casualties, with nearly 7,000 killed.

The fighting was intense and the stories of heroism were astonishing. More medals for valor were awarded for action on Iwo Jima than in any other

battle in U.S. history. Out of the 84 Medals of Honor awarded to Marines for action in World War II, 24 were presented for action at Iwo Jima. Of the six men raising the U.S. flag in the memorable photograph, three would be killed in action within days of participating in the event; two others would return to the states to quickly die ignominious deaths. Only one would live to an advanced age, never publicly commenting on the event.

These Americans — a mill worker from New England, a Pennsylvania coal-miner’s son, an Arizona Indian, a Kentucky tobacco farmer, a teenager from Wisconsin’s dairy land and a Texan from the oil fields — embodied the patriotic passions of a nation determined to defeat totalitarianism. Their act of courage, forever frozen in time by the snap of a shutter, defines the meaning of our flag — a symbol of hope and boundless loyalty.

So now, you know just a fraction of one “story behind the story.” The humbling part of the story is that there are countless other heroic events cloaked behind the soft fabric of our nation’s flag. Because of this, I consider it a privileged to salute our flag — a gesture of thanks to all of those who have served our great nation. Like the Marines on Mount Surabachi, and the astronauts on the moon’s lunar surface, we hoist a flag every day at Kunsan — an act that speaks to the magnificence of our nation — a nation second to none!

Wolf says thanks

The band “Bitter” played an outstanding performance for our Wolf Pack on Aug. 24 and 25 both at the Loring Club and the 8th Civil Engineer hooch. Darryl, Alan, Matt and Matt—great job! In particular, I’d like to thank you for the donations you provided for the Air Force Aid Society. The AFAS is a non-profit organization that provides emergency assistance and education programs to Air Force members and their families. This fund helps our Air Force family in times of need in such instances as when family members deploy or if a crises arises where money is hard to come by. Thank you “Bitter” and other members of the Wolf Pack for helping our Air Force families worldwide. —Col. Burt Field, 8th Fighter Wing commander

Commander’s Hotline

Question: I’ve got a problem. They shut off the water in our building this morning, Bldg. 339, and I don’t think they warned us appropriately on that. I would just like to report that and if you could give me a call back, that would be great.

Answer: Thanks for your concern. The scheduled water outage that occurred Aug. 21 unexpectedly affected many 300-series dormitories. Scheduled water outages were planned from Aug. 21 through Sept. 14 to support contractor replacement of base water lines and valves, and were not well advertised. The Aug. 21 outage was expected to only affect Republic of Korea apartments and a few 200-series facilities, all who were notified in advance. Unfortunately we made a mistake, due to outdated reference drawings that did not correctly predict the consequences of closing valves to isolate water lines. Since the incident, we have halted contractor operations to reevaluate our plan. We

The commander’s hotline is your direct line of communication between me and the Wolf Pack. It’s one of several means of helping to resolve concerns and to get my response to comments and questions. As a general rule, I ask you to contact the agency involved first, but if you are not satisfied, call the hotline at 782-5284, e-mail the 8th Fighter Wing Public Affairs office or e-mail me directly.



Col. Burt Field
8th Fighter Wing commander

have reviewed the facility impacts, and expanded the list of potential affected facilities based on this incident. Our revised plan will impact dormitories weekdays (8 a.m.-6 p.m.) and administrative facilities predominately on weekends (8 a.m.-6 p.m.) to lessen impact. All dormitory managers and facility managers will receive at least two days advance notification, and signs will be placed on affected facility entrances. The outage schedule will also be posted on Commander’s Access Channel and is available in every squadron. I apologize for the inconvenience and assure you we are doing what we can to ensure this doesn’t happen again.



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